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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: NIGERIA: STATUS OF POLIO ERADICATION
INITIATIVE (PEI)

REF: 03/25/04 POLIO ERADICATION INITIATIVE CABLE

SUMMARY

1. This cable provides an update on the current situation related to polio eradication in Nigeria, including actions in process and to be undertaken over the next two-week period. The Deputy Governor of Kano State told Charg April 26 that GON, UN and Kano were in agreement that polio vaccine would be procured from Indonesia under State supervision. Once the procurement is accomplished a public education program would be launched to convince Kano residents that the vaccine was uncontaminated. Kano State leadership is now waiting for the GON to arrange the procurement trip to Indonesia. There has been no polio immunization activity in Kano since mid-2003, resulting in a rapid increase in new cases and a widening of the geographic area affected. In 2003, Nigeria recorded 355 of the 745 cases worldwide. From January 1 to February 24, 2004, 63 cases have been confirmed in 17 states - 17 of the cases are in Kano and 14 in Kaduna. The second round of 2004 National Immunization Days (NIDs) has been concluded and debriefings held at the national level. Currently round three (April 24-27) is under way in all states except Kano.

CURRENT ACTIVITIES

2. Firm dates have been set for the remainder of the 2004 rounds: May 22-25; October 9-12; and November 13-16. Responsive mop-ups will be conducted between June and September. Further, all rounds for 2004 will be full NIDs, as opposed to sNIDs (sub-National Immunization Days) that would target only infected states, in view of the fact that 24 of the 37 states are now infected with the wild poliovirus and all 37 are considered 'at risk.'

3. The Governor of Kano traveled to the United States and returned on April 15. Prior to his departure, he met with the US Charge d'Affaires (ref cable #00553) and with Dr. (Mrs.) Awosika, Chief Executive of the National Program on Immunization (NPI). In both meetings, Governor Shekarau indicated a willingness to resume implementation of the national immunization days (NIDs) as soon as certain conditions are met (i.e., assurance and provision of "clean" vaccines). Kano Deputy Governor Abdullahi met with the Charg April 26. He affirmed that the GON, UN and Kano Governor had agreed that a Kano State delegation would accompany GON representatives to Indonesia to procure vaccine. If the Kano delegation were convinced that the vaccine was uncontaminated, the State would permit reintroduction of the OPV. The Deputy Governor noted that a public education campaign would be necessary to re-educate the public that originally rejected the vaccine. Kano is now waiting for the GON to schedule the procurement trip. The Deputy Governor maintained that there is frequent contact with the GON about the vaccine procurement, but was unclear about a timeline.

4. Dr. (Mrs.) Awosika met, on Thursday, April 8, with Dr. Bichi, one of the Kano scientists who initiated the protest against the oral polio vaccine (OPV), the Commissioner of Health and the Primary Health Care Director of Kano State. At that time, they echoed the sentiments of the Governor (above) and felt confident of full participation by Kano in the near future.

5. The WHO Country Representative, Dr. Mohammed Belhocine, contacted the Minister of Health on April 12 to obtain a status update. The Minister said he would meet with the Governor as soon as possible and request that he make a public statement in order to adequately prepare for resumption of polio vaccination in Kano. It remains now to wait for this public statement by the Governor, declaring his acceptance of the OPV available (most likely the batch from Indonesia) and his approval for Kano to fully participant in subsequent rounds. The Minister further stated that an Inter-Agency

Coordinating Committee (ICC) meeting would take place on Tuesday, April 20, the first ICC meeting since January. During the course of that meeting there was, unfortunately, nothing new was reported on the status of Kano State's participation in the polio eradication initiative (PEI). The April round is now underway, without Kano.

¶6. It is now known that poliovirus from Nigeria has migrated as far away as Botswana, increasing the pressure on Nigeria to step up both coverage and quality of the NIDs nationwide. Adding further to that pressure, it has been reported that a new outbreak of meningitis is now occurring in some areas in Kano State, and rejection of even that vaccine is taking place in many areas throughout the state.

¶7. Advocacy efforts continue throughout the northern states by the National Program on Immunization (NPI) and other agencies, as appropriate.

¶8. The USAID initiative in Kano (participatory learning and action for community ownership - PLACO) has now completed the groundwork in all 44 of the local government areas (LGAs) in Kano State. What this means is that, once a green light is given to resume the PEI, mobilization and implementation can happen quickly.

DONOR COMMITMENT

¶9. Government and donors have reviewed the first two NIDs rounds of 2004 and have re-organized the strategy for the remainder of the year, based upon the debriefing reports from the field.

¶10. The Core Technical Group continues to meet a minimum of once weekly, except during the implementation of NIDs, at which time the participants are in the field monitoring.

NEXT STEPS

¶11. Debriefing of the April round will take place immediately following conclusion of the round (April 27) and preparation will begin for the May round.

¶12. ICC approval of proposed national-level structure changes must be secured at the next ICC meeting, scheduled for Monday, May 10, and subsequent actions initiated to make the changes quickly functional (e.g., formation of new working groups to replace former committees for training and social mobilization and an operations center in Abuja).

¶13. A state of readiness will be maintained in Kano State in order to quickly mobilize as soon as the way becomes clear to resume vaccination activities in the state.

CONCLUSION

¶14. The problem with polio eradication in Kano now hinges on the GON to follow through on its commitment to acquire OPV from Indonesia with adequate oversight from Kano State. Once safe Indonesian vaccine is acquired, the Kano Governor has committed to implementing the PEI.

¶15. Post will continue to provide regular reports on progress in the effort to eradicate polio in Nigeria.
ROBERTS